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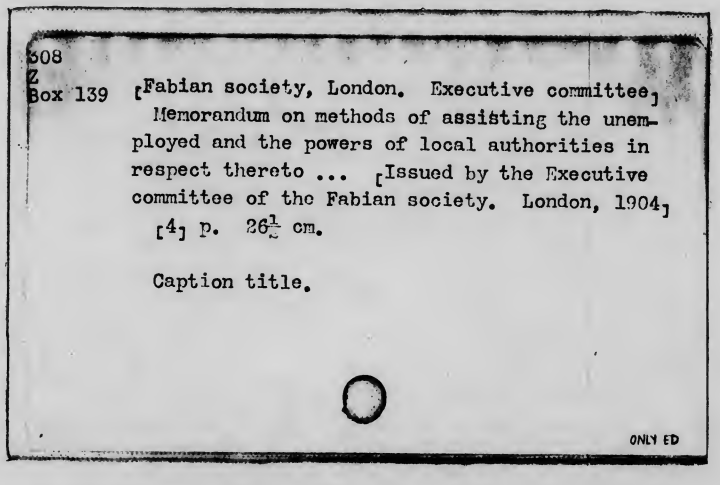

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Labour - Unemployed
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MEMORANDUM

ON METHODS OF ASSISTING

THE UNEMPLOYED

AND THE POWERS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN RESPECT THERETO.

308
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Box 139

During the past ten years the Unemployed Problem has been thoroughly discussed at conferences of local authorities, and in books and magazine articles by economists and social reformers. A number of conclusions on the classification of the unemployed and the possible remedies for the various classes have been arrived at by almost universal consent, and in the immediate future nothing important is likely to be discovered which will throw fresh light on the problem. The purpose of this Memorandum is to state these generally accepted conclusions in a brief and simple form, in order that members of local governing bodies, authorities and others concerned in the question may learn what can be done for the unemployed under the existing law and what changes of the law are necessary to carry into effect generally approved remedies.

Classification of the Unemployed.

Four classes of unemployed may be distinguished, for whom different treatment is generally necessary. It must not, however, be supposed that these classes are wholly distinct. In fact they shade off one into another, and unemployment itself tends to degrade men from the higher classes to the lower; whilst remedial measures should be directed towards helping them to move in the opposite direction. The classes are:

I.—The unemployable, that is, (*a*) sturdy tramps who will not work steadily because they are mentally incapable of continuing in one employment for a long period, unless under compulsion; and (*b*) those who are physically as well as mentally unable to cope with hard work, by reason of feebleness of body and mind. A large proportion of this class oscillates between the workhouse and the prison. This is the lowest class; it always exists, but its numbers are increased in times of trade depression by recruits forced down to it from the classes above.

II.—A large proportion of the unemployed, especially at times of depression, consists of unskilled laborers, many of whom never have regular jobs; others in good times get fairly constant work, but as they have no skilled trade, their wages are always low, and the least depression sends them into the ranks of the unemployed.

III.—"The irreducible minimum" class consists of those at any given time out of work owing to changes of job, to alterations in the form of industry, to the regular changes of seasonal trades, and similar permanent causes. Even in times of the best trade, nearly two per cent. of Trade Unionists are reported as out of work.

IV.—The highest class is the skilled artizan, thrown out of work owing to trade depression. He often has a Trade Union which keeps him for many weeks with out-of-work benefit. But in really bad times he may be out for many months and even years together, and at last must seek help from other sources than his Trade Union and Co-operative Society.

REMEDIES.

These may be classified as follows:

I.—Immediate Remedies for unemployment due to depression of trade, that is, for classes iv., ii., and, to some extent, iii.

(*a*) The arrangement by local authorities of their regular work so as to provide employment in winter, that is, in the worst season. Every local authority has bridges and other iron-work which must be periodically painted, streets which require relaying or repairing, and other work, all of which should be promptly put in hand when exceptional distress is imminent.

(*b*) Special works should be also undertaken by the local authority. In every town there are streets which are ready for paving, or new parks which can be laid out. Such work should be planned in the summer, and put in hand when the wages paid are most useful to the community. Those cities which own large catchment areas for their water-works should afforest at any rate portions, which will ultimately yield profits. Leeds has already resolved to do this.

(*c*) Labor Bureaux. Even in the worst of times there are some employers who cannot get the men they want, whilst there are men only too willing to work who are idle because they cannot find employers. Labor Bureaux bring employers and employed together, and benefit both parties.

II.—Remedies requiring time for preparation and parliamentary sanction.

These remedies cannot, save in quite exceptional cases, be put into operation by any local authority, but petitions for the necessary action to be taken by parliament are useful.

1.—*Afforestation.* All authorities are agreed that the cultivation of trees is unduly neglected in this country, and that it will ultimately yield a profit. The necessary work would require a large amount of unskilled labor. But such work can only be undertaken (*a*) on crown land, or (*b*) on land bought by the central government for the purpose, or (*c*) on land bought by local authorities under a new Act giving them the necessary power, and on catchment areas previously mentioned. The selection and purchase of land, the preparation of plans, the purchase of the young trees, the provision of shelter and supplies for the laborers in places necessarily remote, must of necessity occupy months at the least, and in many cases years. Therefore, the necessary steps should be taken at once, in the hope that the scheme may be in operation in the winter of 1905-6.

2.—*Reclamation of foreshores.* The same considerations in the main apply to such proposals as the reclamation of the Wash. Other foreshores, as those along the Thames, present less physical but probably more numerous legal difficulties.

These two remedies are valuable because they would chiefly benefit the largest and most helpless class, unskilled laborers.

3.—The only remedy for class I., the unemployable, is *Agricultural Colonies* on lines similar to those of Germany, Belgium and Holland. Small attempts have been made in England by the Salvation Army at Hadleigh, and by certain Boards of Guardians on farms lent them for this purpose. By general [illegible] *colonies offer the most hopeful means* for temporarily assisting and permanently improving the unemployable and semi-criminal class. But statutory powers are required both to enable local authorities to establish such colonies, and to regulate the conditions under which residence, for a reasonable period, may be enforced on those for whom regular work is the best medicine.

For unemployment due to trade depression farm colonies are ill-adapted, partly because farm labor is a skilled trade, and partly because farms must be worked in times of good as well as bad trade. At present these farms have been only used as a test of willingness to work.

III.—Indirect Remedies not immediately effective.

1.—*Shortening of the hours of labor.* Where men are worked over-long, the shortening of the hours of labor would be an all-round benefit. In service occupations (that is, mainly in transport trades) reduction of hours means an equivalent increase in the number of men employed. In other trades it is generally believed that a moderate reduction of hours would not decrease the output per man, and would not therefore increase the number employed.

2.—*Technical Instruction.* It is often true that there is a demand for skilled tradesmen which cannot be satisfied, while laborers knowing no trade are constantly seeking work. A man who knows a trade gets better wages, and as a rule more constant work.

3.—*Prevention of Rural Depopulation.* Even in the worst of times nowadays the farmers want labor while the towns are crowded with unemployed. Measures (not very easy to devise) for attracting labor to the agricultural districts, and for keeping the population already there from migrating into towns, will tend to decrease unemployment. The improvement of rural housing is perhaps the most promising proposal.

4.—*Reform of Taxation.* Any transfer of the burden of taxation from the poor to the rich will tend to increase real wages. It will not directly affect the amount of employment, but it will mitigate the suffering caused by want of work because it is those getting very low wages who suffer most and soonest when they are out of work.

5.—*A Minister of Labor.* The recognition by the State that it is definitely its business to look after the supply and condition of labor in the interests of the community might presently lead to many and valuable reforms tending to remove the evils of unemployment.

OCT-29 1923 A&T

6.—*Old Age Pensions.* The assumption by the State of the duty to provide for the veterans of labor, at any rate to the extent of 5s. a week, would benefit not merely the recipients but those who in many cases at present support their aged parents and relatives, and thus increase the available incomes of the workers concerned.

IV.—Powers of local authorities.

Parish Meetings and Councils.—Rural districts are not as a rule largely interested in the problem. Parish Meetings and Councils have but small powers for undertaking work and thus employing labor. Any jobs needed should be put in hand, and in serious cases appeal can be made to the Rural District Council to undertake more extensive works.

Rural District Councils. These councils, having charge of the roads and of sanitation, can provide employment on repairs to the roads, and by putting in hand promptly any drainage or other works required in their district.

Guardians of the Poor. These are the same persons in rural districts as the District Councillors. As guardians it is their duty so to administer Poor Relief as to prevent all starvation and extreme suffering. They can provide relief for the able-bodied by opening stone-yards; they can send men to farm colonies in the few cases where these are available. Generally speaking, they can relax a little the rigidity of their rules, and give out-door relief more freely and liberally than in ordinary times. But they cannot buy land for farm colonies for the unemployed as is often stated without the consent of the Local Government Board, and whether this would be given is doubtful.

Urban District Councils and Metropolitan Borough Councils. These councils have much the same powers as Town Councils (described in the next paragraph), except (and this is important) that they are strictly kept to the letter of the law by the Government Auditor. The Local Government Board has, however, announced that exceptional latitude will be allowed in dealing with the unemployed.

Town Councils. These councils can—

(i) Arrange their regular work so as to employ most men at the worst season.

(ii) Put in hand special works, paving roads, laying-out and planting parks, clearing insanitary areas.

(iii) Establish Labor Bureaux.

(iv) Urge upon large employers to work short time instead of discharging hands, and to undertake promptly any new works contemplated.

(v) Organize the raising of Relief Funds by private subscriptions.

County Councils. The London County Council is equivalent to a Town Council except that it shares the work with the Metropolitan Borough Councils, and that it is subject to Government Audit. Other County Councils can act on the same lines as Town Councils, but their opportunities are relatively limited.

The reader may well remark that all these powers come to but little, and offer a wholly inadequate solution of the problem. This is unfortunately too true. Unemployment, like sickness, poverty and ignorance, is a terrible evil, for which no immediate and complete remedy has been discovered.

V.—Doubtful Schemes.

1.—*Municipal Workshops for the Unemployed.* Public authorities cannot provide workshops where the unemployed may work at their trade for two reasons. (*a*) Because under the present system of large machine industry by far the greater number of workers are employed, not in producing the finished article from almost raw materials (as for example, the cabinet-maker who makes furniture from planks of wood), but in completing but one step in a long industrial process. Painters, plumbers, masons, miners, moulders, pattern-makers, and, above all, general laborers, could produce nothing in Municipal Workshops which would find a market. (*b*) A less conclusive argument against such institutions is this. Cabinet-makers and boot-makers (two classes of workmen who can turn out finished products by hand labor) are out of work because there is not sufficient demand for furniture and boots. The establishment of a municipal boot and furniture factory would not increase the demand for boots and furniture, and, consequently, the products would not sell, or, if sold, an equal number of other men would probably be left unemployed.

2.—*Poor Law Farms.* Under Acts of George III. and William IV. every parish was empowered to buy fifty acres of land in order to set the unemployed to work on it; and it is often urged that Guardians should exercise this statutory power.

But it is necessary before this power can be generally exercised that the Local Government Board should draw up rules under which Guardians can act.

The Local Government Board, rightly or wrongly, takes the view that the Act is obsolete and declines to draw up general rules, unless expressly directed to do so by Parliament.

Therefore the Guardians, as things stand, cannot make use of their statutory powers without special permission. The then President of the Local Government Board announced ten years ago that any proposal to buy land made by a Board of Guardians would be considered on its merits. But, at any rate in recent years, the power has never been exercised.

VI.—Mr. Long's Scheme.

The President of the Local Government Board has issued a circular inviting Metropolitan Poor Law and Municipal authorities (*a*) to form joint local Committees, together with charitable associations, and (*b*) a joint Central Committee, with additional appointed members, for dealing with the Unemployed Problem. He has promised (i) to allow the working expenses of such Committees to be charged to the rates; (ii) to provide accommodation for the Central Committee.

Applicants for work are to be divided into two classes, (*a*) "respectable men" out of work, (*b*) "ordinary applicants for poor relief." The latter will be referred to the Guardians; for the former the Local, and failing that the Central, Committee will try to find work.

The Central Committee is to co-ordinate the work of the Local committees and to undertake larger works; it is to receive voluntary subscriptions, and the Local Government Board will sanction contributions from Borough Councils.

The scheme only applies to London.

VII.—List of Some Recent Schemes, Books, etc.

"How to deal with the Unemployed." By MARY HIGGS. Brown, Langham and Co. 2s.

"The Tramp Ward." By MARY HIGGS. Reprinted from the *Contemporary Review*. John Heywood. 2d.

Report of Board of Trade on agencies and methods of dealing with the Unemployed in Foreign Countries. By D. F. SCHLOSS, Eyre and Spottiswoode or King and Son. 1s.

The Unemployed. Mr. Long's Scheme. Eyre and Spottiswoode or King and Son. 1d.

Mansion House Committee on the Unemployed, 1903-4. Report of Executive Committee. Abstract of ditto. 4 pp. leaflet. Both supplied by the Secretary, Mansion House, London. (No price.)

"Leeds and the Unemployed." Leeds Fabian Society, The Arts Club, 18 Park-lane, Leeds.

Metropolitan Borough of Woolwich. Report of Conference. Of the Clerk, Town Hall, Woolwich. (No price.)

Women's Industrial Council. Memorandum on Unemployed Women. Of the Secretary, 19 Buckingham-street, Strand. (No price.)

"The Unemployed Problem, with some Suggestions for solving it." By J. KEIR HARDIE, M.P. I. L. P., 10 Red Lion-court, E.C. 1d.

Metropolitan Borough of Islington. The Unemployed. Report of Conference. Of the Clerk, Town Hall, Islington. (No price.)

Relief of distress due to Want of Employment. Report of Special Committee of the Charity Organization Society. C. O. S., 19 Buckingham-street, Strand. 1s.

"The Unemployable and the Unemployed." By J. B. PATON, D.D. James Clark and Co., 13 Fleet-street, E.C. 3d.

All the foregoing were published in the autumn of 1904.

London County Council. Lack of Employment in London. Minutes of Conference, February, 1903. No. 662. King. 6d.

"Famishing London: a Study of the Unemployed and Unemployable." By F. A. MACKENZIE. Hodder. 1s.

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Issued by the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society.

EDW. R. PEASE,
Secretary.

21*st December*, 1904.

7. Lambeth v. Cambermell, Report of M. by D. of Commons

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